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ABSTRACT

The literature on competitive behavior in children is examined. Sections of the review concern the socializing process of competitiveness, evolutionary foundations, early developmental processes, the relationship between competition and aggression, gender differences, competition and cooperation, anthropological perspectives, effects of competition (including assimilated values, stress and anxiety), and Type A behavior development in children. Implications of findings for each area are discussed. A new dimensional framework for competition is presented in order to prompt a more differentiated conceptualization, especially for future investigations. The framework distinguishes many variations of competitive behavior. It is concluded that competitiveness has a multifactorial basis. There is a complex interrelationship between competitive behavior and other developmental phenomena. Competitive behavior appears to be closely related to stress. Competitive behavior can be a positive developmental characteristic, in that it can be elegantly adaptive, constructive, and successful, as many young sports champions and high achievers can attest. But extreme or inappropriate competitiveness can be detrimental to the developing child, both as an unconstructive social response, and as a characteristic that can increase the potential for Type A behavior for a young child, or later in adulthood. Citations number 139. (RH)

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THE DEVELOPMENTAL ASPECTS AND ORIGINS OF COMPETITIVE BEHAVIOR IN CHILDREN

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Abstract

The literature on competitive behavior in children is examined with particular attention to contributory influences, gender differences, consequences of competitiveness, and emerging findings in sport psychology (with special reference to youth sports). An analysis of the development of Type A behavior in children includes the identification of Type A children along a discussion of antecedent factors.

Competitive behavior has typically been approached in the developmental literature with polarized thinking and a myopic perspective, often resulting in impotent research. Understanding the development of competitiveness in children requires a broader canvas, encompassing ethological and evolutionary considerations, motivational theory, childrearing practices, socialization processes, and cultural diversity. Implications in each of these areas are discussed.

The salient conclusions drawn from this literature review are: (1) competitiveness has a multifactorial basis; (2) a complex interrelationship exists between competitive behavior and other developmental phenomena; (3) competitive behavior appears closely related to stress. In order to prompt a more differentiated conceptualization, especially for future investigation, a new dimensional framework for competition is presented, which distinguishes many variations of competitive type behavior.

Like so many aspects of human development, competitive behavior is a complex phenomenon, intertwined with a multitude of variables and dimensions. Here competitiveness and competition are viewed from an interdisciplinary perspective and examined with the objective of elucidating competitive behavior and its role in development of the child.

Competition and cooperation are controversial topics among behavioral scientists. The very first controversy involves the definition of competition. Taking a social comparison approach, Festinger (1954) regards competition as a nonobjective process of relative evaluation. Deutsch (1973) considers competition as striving for opposing goals, where there is a negative correlation between goal attainments, a concept summarized by: "a participant can attain his goal if and only if the others with whom his is linked cannot attain their goals" (p. 20). Similarly, Marwell and Schmitt (1975) identify a situation as competitive if not all participants are rewarded for their efforts. Representing traditional behaviorism, Skinner (1953) construes competitors as engaging in a social interchange where there are only winners or losers, "when the behavior of one can be reinforced only at the cost of the reinforcement of the other" (p. 311); this is the classic "zero-sum" game or situation.

Noting that the term "competition" often carries various personalized meanings, Martens (1975) proposes that it is a process, neither good nor bad, that includes both subjective and objective situations, further categorized by a person's response and the consequences that follow.

As one considers different conceptual notions of competition, it seems akin to the proverbial blind men describing an elephant, part by part. Indeed, as a scientific construct, Martens (1975) labels competition a

"conceptual disaster." An impressively detailed review of numerous comparative definitions by Watson (1984) serves to confirm this.

Despite such diversity, Carolyn Sherif's (1976) interpretation may be the most useful in terms of clarity and universality: "Competition consists of activities directed more or less consistently toward meeting a standard or achieving a goal in which performance by a person or by his group is compared and evaluated relative to that of selected other persons or groups" (p.19). In Sherif's view, competitive behavior can be a social process performed in the presence of others, or it can be entirely individual, as in practicing a skill or accomplishing something for its own sake.

SOCIALIZING PROCESS OF COMPETITIVENESS

There is little doubt that children respond to competitive situations as part of an overall socialization process, which tends to be manifested clearly in the arena of competitive sport (Loy, Kenyon, and McPherson, 1981; Curry and Jiobu, 1984; Sage, 1974). In the process of socialization, a developing person learns certain role behaviors, begins to adapt to the social environment, tends to conform to expectations, and acquires identities and values as a direct result of participation in various social situations (Loy, et al., 1981).

Sports, games and play, therefore, act as powerful socializing agents in our society (Loy, et al., 1981; Figler, 1981; Martens, 1975). When children simply get involved with sports, whatever the level, a certain amount of socialization is reflected (Eitzen and Sage, 1986), regardless of how serious

or proficient they become. Once the child begins participating, the transmission of values through sports can be readily apparent. Society highly values success and competition - the real essence of sport. Thus, sport is interpreted by many observers as mirroring society's basic structure and values (Curry and Jiobu, 1984; Boyle, 1963). Emphasizing this connection, Eitzen and Sage (1986) propose that, "In learning the culture ... most Americans have internalized values that predispose them to be interested in the outcome of competitive situations, and competition is the sine qua non of sports" (p. 59).

Further, competitive environments, including sports, are interpreted by some as serving to accustom children to the values, attitudes and behavior found specifically in the corporate organization. Bardwick (1986) states flatly that "school is, of course, just the preparation for a career position. The competition in college is merely the preparation for the competition in the business world" (p. 23). Sports as ritualized contests, with winners displaying dominance and losers submission, can be considered precursors of a modern industrial organization ranking system, which children learn quickly (Maclay and Knipe, 1972). In a study of fathers having sons on youth teams, Dunleavy, Miracle and Rees (1982) concluded that: (a) the structure of children's sports resembles the corporate organization (indicating how bureaucratically formal kids' sports have become); (b) values stressed in youth sports settings reflect corporate values, especially that of being a dedicated "team player;" (c) both youth teams and business operate on the "performance principle," where playing by the rules is the ideal but winning is what really counts; (d) fathers generally believe that sports fosters skills that are valuable in the business world.

But the notion of sports as a work-world model has generally been applied only to boys. Interestingly, Harrigan (1977) considers the fact that women lack experience with youth team sports to be one explanation for their limited success in the corporate world. Since most evidence shows no fundamental difference in competitiveness between boys and girls (Sherif, 1974; Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974), apparently it is access to those socializing elements of sport which women have been deprived of. Underlying cultural processes may be responsible for dissuading girls from early interest in team sports (Iso-Ahola and Hatfield, 1986).

Interaction of social influences and individual traits renders the complexities of socialization an enigma, especially since no single variable can truly be isolated. It is known, for example, that a child's interest in competitive sports grows rapidly from age 6, peaking at 11 or 12 (Iso-Ahola and Hatfield, 1986). Of course this interest conveniently coincides with the broadest availability (and promotion) of Little League and other team sports.

Evidence is consistent in confirming the potency of parental influence on children becoming involved with competitive sports, which is specifically manifested in parental modeling, encouragement and expectancy behavior. Kenyon and McPherson (1973) argue that the greater the parental involvement in sport, the more children will participate; kids exhibit "sport role specialization" (p. 329). Still, the extent to which parents respond to their child's initial interest in competitive games is a dimension of the family's role that is less understood. Abundant background on the power (perhaps necessity) of the parent-child relationship in career launching is offered by Emily Greenspan in her anecdotal work entitled, Little Winners; Inside the World of the Child Sports Star (1983).

EVOLUTIONARY FOUNDATIONS

Inquiring as to the origins and causes of a behavioral trait such as competitiveness inevitably leads to considerations involving instinct and evolution. This is particularly evident when probing the nature of the closely associated trait of aggression. Debate continues: Where does instinct end and learning begin? Is man naturally aggressive? Is it competition or cooperation that will insure survival?

Darwin's original hypothesis regarding natural selection through successful competition, as well as applications of it to the human condition (i.e. social Darwinism), tend to oversimplify the genuine developmental issues. A blanket proposal that all creatures compete to survive, or that competition is "natural" (meaning innate and inevitable), ignores vast subtleties and complexities that constitute the very essence of human beings.

However, evolutionary theory and ethology provide fertile ground for clues to the essence of human competitiveness. At the biological level, a primal direction and consequence of competition is reproduction; those organisms successful at surviving and mating contribute positively to the species' gene pool. The scheme is observable in life forms from microscopic protozoa up to elephant seals, where only the strongest, dominant bulls mate (and transfer successful genes) with the cows. In all mammalian reproduction, it is the single competitively successful sperm, among millions, which fertilizes the egg, perhaps foretelling struggles of real life.

Competitive selection is an area hotly debated by theorists from many disciplines. If reproductive selection is assumed to propel human competitive behavior, immediate questions arise. How has competition for preferred mates been expressed in the kinds of social groups formed over human history (Alexander, 1975)? How are phenomena like sexual dimorphism or cooperation explained (Gorney, 1976)? Even altruism (i.e. unselfish concern for others) seems to defy evolutionary theory, based on the notion of ultimate selfishness in reproductive competition (Alexander, 1975); it is an issue that, by itself, has spawned numerous genetic models (Hamilton, 1963). In his provocative book, The Naked Ape (1967), Desmond Morris argues that man's evolutionary roots favored competitiveness, since man (as a primate) was an individual rather than a pack hunter; but that man's cooperativeness is also intrinsic, as it has become manifested in human language, grooming and community living.

Some psychologists theorize that it is a naturalistic sharing or imitative (not competitive) motive which organizes infant behavior and allows children to become socially cooperative members of cultures. Trevarthen (1988) argues that "the phases of cooperative awareness, which I suggest are genuine universals, are conclusive evidence of intrinsic developmental control. We will never understand linguistic, cognitive, perceptual or motor development of children without a correct appreciation of their motives for co-operative awareness" (p. 80).

Nevertheless, the notion that some degree of competitiveness is innate seems plausible on the basis of a multitude of naturalistic observations. Competition for food resources, establishment of territories, dominance behavior all are adaptations found in a wide variety of species (Wilson,

1971). Maclay and Knipe (1972) represent the popular viewpoint that man's compelling quest for social order through a competitive ranking system is an obvious evolutionary extension of the easily observable dominance structure characterizing monkey and ape societies. Even species-specific forms of animal behavior, such as well-orchestrated "warfare" between ant colonies (Wilson, 1971), or displayed male-dominance hierarchy of a wolfpack (Poole, 1985), readily suggest analogs in human competitive behavior.

Appealing and fascinating as ethological observations may be, assuming them to be realistic prototypes for human behavior is probably misguided. During the process of evolutionary adaptation the distinction between selected individual, group and species traits is easily blurred (Alexander, 1975). The emergence of a particular trait, as well as its usefulness, should be viewed comparatively over a long term context. Wilson (1971) emphasizes this point by citing shifting food supplies for birds, which may transform their "optimal strategy from one employing open aggression and a tendency toward solitary existence to one of cooperative existence" (p. 195).

Thus, there is a quicksand-like difficulty in searching for evidence of genuinely "innate" behavior in nature. Concerning the three million species of animal life on earth, Wilson (1971) underscores the issue by noting, "Our knowledge of the occurrence of competitive and aggressive behavior among them is extremely poor" (p. 185). More strongly, he condemns as "facile and unscientific" the often-coincidental and contrived analogies between animal and human behavior. Many sociologists and naturalists reject blanket concepts of a biological primal struggle. Darwin himself recoiled from the simplistic notion of total systematic competition when he wrote in The Descent of Man, "in numberless animal societies, the struggle between

separate individuals for the means of existence disappears; struggle is replaced by co-operation" (quoted in Dubos, 1959, p. 62). Interestingly, recent breakthroughs in microbiological theory reveal how nature's diversity has arisen by microbial cooperation and symbiosis as well as by traditional Darwinian competition (McDermott, 1989).

In sum, the evolutionary issue is horrendously complex. Although it is likely there is some instinctual or biogenetic element contributing to the development of competitiveness, the focus of attention must shift elsewhere.

EARLY DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESSES

Just as theories about causal attribution of competitiveness vary widely, so do opinions regarding developmental parameters, such as age differences. If some maturation point actually exists which marked the onset of competitive behavior, it would be worth knowing. In his early (but still relevant) landmark studies, Piaget (1932) observed that competitive tendencies become apparent in children playing marbles at age 7 or 8 – the point where they acquire a basic understanding of rules. Coincidentally it is the same age when cooperative behavior begins to emerge (Helanko, 1963). Ironically, Piaget (1932) labeled this stage "incipient cooperation" (p. 17)

It is hard to find evidence that infants actually engage in true competitive behavior. An infant's loud cries often gain the caregiver's attention by overcoming ambient distractions. One might construe crying as a form of competition (against noise and for attention), but it would be a poor fit with established defining concepts of competition that focus on relative comparisons. Sherif (1974) argues pointedly that, "As consistent patterns of activity directed toward competitive performance, competition is simply nonexistent in infancy and early childhood" (p. 317).

As an intriguing exception, researchers at the Univerity of Besancon (France) observed competitive behavior among children 18 to 36 months (Montager, Restoin & Henry, 1982). From detailed analysis of several hundred thousand feet of 16mm film, specific action sequences of these very young children engaging in competitive-type behavior could be isolated. Such behaviors included children taking possession of objects, controlling new situations, establishing dominance, and simply exhibiting aggression. The following is one, perhaps surprising, observation of babies in the study (Montager, et al., 1982): "Threatening behavior, such as opening the mouth wide, clenching a fist, or loud vocalizations are most common in competitive situations" (p. 296).

In the Besancon studies there is some question as to how premeditated or conscious the communication styles of these 2 and 3 year-olds could have been; to what degree was a child aware of any social comparisons? Research repeatedly confirms that the display of competitive behavior becomes more frequent as the child grows older (Toda, Shinotsuka, McClintock & Stech, 1978; McClintock, 1969; McClintock, 1977; Nichols, 1978), suggesting that competitiveness is partly attributable to maturation. Thus, when certain assertive behaviors are framed in terms of "performance," pre-toddlers probably do not compete; when they are viewed as patterned purposeful behavior, they probably do.

RELATIONSHIP OF COMPETITION AND AGGRESSION

Development of competitive behavior and attitudes is closely associated with aggression (Coakley, 1978; Bredemeier, 1983), especially when considered from an evolutionary viewpoint (Duquette, 1985). For many of the same

reasons that the drive to compete (for survival, dominance, etc.) is seen as having biological roots, many scientists believe that aggression has an instinctual determinant. The late ethologist Konrad Lorenz, in his classic On Aggression (1966), argued that aggressive behavior is the outcome of an innate drive in man, a creature ill-equipped both physically (no claws, no fangs, etc.) and socially (not submissive) to suitably control that aggression. Interestingly, Lorenz viewed physically competitive sports as a means to vent aggression and thereby limit it.

Bandura (1973) asserts that aggression is acquired by direct experience (including conditioning) and by observational learning or modeling. Speculating that all humans possess the "neurophysiological mechanisms" for aggressive behavior, Bandura (1973) holds that the activation and the specific form, degree, targets and frequency of that behavior are largely determined by social (learning) experience.

Though aggression is not demanded in all competitive situations, sports is one where children quickly learn about the close connection between aggression and success. Duquette (1985) simplifies the equation: "... at certain levels of competition winning is the goal and certain behaviors are necessary to attain it. Primary among these is aggression" (p. 169). But exactly how aggression operates as a competitive factor is not clear. Calhoun (1987) presents four traditional (and controversial) theories explaining the association of aggressive violence in sports competition: (a) the reduction of violence by its discharge in sports activities; (b) increase in violence by the arousal of anger; (c) sports violence interpreted as a parallel to other cultural patterns like crime and war; (d) sports as a symbolization of hidden or repressed social aggression and

violence often connected with urbanization. Each hypothesis provides a look at the marraige of aggressive violence and modern American sports from a different perspective; there is substantial evidence supporting each view.

Prevailing social norms for aggressiveness have such deep implications for development of children's competitiveness, it is important to examine their roots. A "culture-pattern model" as an explanation of learned acquisition of aggressive behavior has been proposed by Sipes (1973), who observed that values like competition tended to be consistently associated with behavior patterns like aggressiveness in many cultures. Based on an investigation of twenty diverse societies, Sipes (1973) found that, in warlike societies, combative sports were more prevalent; this served to discredit the claim that violent games discharge accumulated aggressive tension (Bredemeier, 1983; Coakley, 1978). Numerous other social scientists and historians have linked the worrysome violence in American society with the violent nature of its most popular spectator (and youth) sports (Bredemeier, 1983).

Having studied relationships between types of games and child-training variables, Roberts and Sutton-Smith (1962) have proposed that a child's games represent an effective means of assuaging interpersonal conflicts. Roberts and Sutton-Smith (1962) have termed theirs a "conflict-enculturation model," proposing that socially induced conflict about responsibility and achievement result in competitive attitudes and styles. Competition between individuals, especially in playing games of skill and chance, can therefore be construed as both a safety valve for frustration and a form of buffered learning by which the child acquires adult traits. These concepts have sometimes been embodied in the terms "practice" play or "symbolic" play (Herron and Sutton-Smith, 1971, p. 280).

Still, the question remains, do many children become competitive because they are aggressive; or do they behave aggressively becuase they are competitive? (Cooperative behavior must briefly be ignored.) Neither theory nor research has fully resolved such a chicken-or-egg issue. Although some developmentalists popularly view competition in youth sports as a healthy outlet for pent-up energy and aggressive drives, significant evidence suggests that aggressive behavior is a consequence of sport involvement (Coakley, 1978). With respect to modern American sport, competition implies aggressiveness (Eitzen and Sage, 1986) - a model presented daily to impressionable youth. Emphasizing the potential destructiveness of this fact, Duquette (1985) urges that children be carefully taught why, where, when and how to behave aggressively.

GENDER DIFFERENCES

Child development research has tended to focus more on differences between boys and girls in terms of the form of social interaction than on the underlying personality dynamics. To say that parents, and society in general, encourage boys to compete more than girls would certainly be an understatement. (For a detailed discussion see Sherif and Rattnay, 1976.) Citing studies conducted over the past 50 years, Iso-Ahola and Hatfield (1986) report that sex differences in sports participation have not changed much during that time: boys are much more interested in competitive sports than are girls, and boys participate more.

Beginning with the encouragement of boys to exhibit greater independent and exploratory behavior in their first year of life (Iso-Ahola and Hatfield, 1986), boys are quickly pointed toward social comparison activities, such as

school playground games. Thereafter, gender differentiation in competitive play is firmly entrenched by the sixth grade, and persists through high school (Medrich, Roizen, Rubin and Buckley, 1982). Beyond just their heightened interest, boys tend to approach games and competitive activities more seriously than girls. Simply competing is a highly reinforced way for boys to win approval, but winning the game is an even greater reassurance for them as "real" boys (Johnsen, 1982). For boys growing up in America, there is an understandable urgency for winning. Not winning all too often carries with it the brand of "loser." (See Tutko and Bruns, 1976; Martens, 1978; Orlick and Botterill, 1975 for enlightening discussions on this topic.)

When girls play organized sports, however, different norms seem to prevail; they are neither subject to the intense pressures to win, nor do they receive the same acclaim for successes (Johnsen, 1982). Pointing out that most social values support competitiveness for boys but not for girls, Johnsen (1982) asserts that girls are likely to develop a play attitude toward sports rather than a seriously competitive one. This conclusion is naturally subject to controversy, especially when objectively superlative sport performances by women are considered. (For example, the best women marathon runners of the 1980s were faster than the men of 50 years ago.) But despite individual differences, general attitudes displayed by girls may be accounted for, according to Bird and Willaims (1980), by "differential patterns of attribution," whereby girls tend to explain thier success or failure in terms of luck rather than performance. The risk in such an analysis, of course, is that it is oversimplified.

There is some question as to whether gender differences with respect to competitive-vs-cooperative behavior are real or are attached to social expectations. From their studies of children's play styles, Fagot and Leinbach (1983) observed "no sex differences in any of the measures of cooperation, although ... both parents and teachers describe girls as more cooperative ..." (p. 112). In a similar vein, Liss (1983) argues that the role of expectations casts doubt over gender studies of children's play, noting that even the labeling of gender alone "can influence ratings of attributions of individuals being observed or described" (p. 151).

In their landmark survey of hundreds of pieces of research on gender differences, Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) conclude that observed competitiveness may be deceptive, especially as it relates to differential underlying drives for achievement.

> There is some reason to believe that boys' achievement motivation needs to be sustained or stimulated by competitive ego-challenging conditions, whereas girls throughout the school years seem to maintain their achievement motivation more easily without such stimulation; indeed at certain ages they may be motivated to avoid competition. (p. 162)

When engaged in competition for friendship boys and girls typically approach the problem differently (Hartup, 1989). Girls often focus on attractiveness and social skills in order to gain favorable social comparison, whereas boys frequently opt for performance-oriented displays such as direct competition in sports. But to suggest that such questions of gender difference are easily explained because girls are allegedly not as competitve as boys would be an over-generalizations (Hartup, 1989). Physical competence, as exhibited through sports, is only one outlet for the child to assert competitiveness, one which may be overemphasized as a determinant or manifestation of the trait.

Numerous other factors should be taken into account when analyzing gender differences. These factors include: the type of activity (e.g. soccer vs swimming); identity of the opponent (e.g. team, person, clock); level of arousal required; behavioral norms and customs of the sport. As these and other dimensions are considered, the criteria by which gender differences are judged quickly multiply. It is also important to consider that competition in settings such as school teams often involves varying degrees of aggression and of cooperation - and usually both.

Thus, while evidence clearly indicates greater male aggressiveness, little may be categorically concluded about sex differences where either competitiveness or cooperativeness are concerned. Such equivocation seems to be a function of inadequate investigation. Pointing out that laboratory tasks for children frequently measure compliance with adults rather than true cooperation with peers, Fagot and Leinbach (1983, p. 112) assert that most psychological measures do not directly assess this aspect of investigation. Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) reason that conclusions are clouded partly because research has failed to isolate competition from related behaviors, like dominance, and from seemingly antithetical behaviors, like cooperation.

COMPETITION AND COOPERATION

Much of the investigation of competition has been structured so as to directly compare competition with cooperation (McClintock and McNeal, 1966; Crockenberg, et al., 1976; Deutsch, 1973; Nowicki, 1982). Social psychological studies typically have focused on specific behaviors observed under highly structured (sometimes contrived) circumstances. Many studies

assume somewhat narrow conceptualizations of competitive and cooperative behavior, rather than viewing them as more general personality traits. Recently, more studies have included three distinct social orientations: competitive, cooperative and individualistic (Knight, 1981; McClintock and Moskowitz, 1977).

Many of these comparisons have yielded findings that are especially interesting from an enculturation standpoint. Cross-cultural developmental studies have consistently demonstrated that Anglo-American children are more competitive and less cooperative than Mexican-American children (Knight and Kagan, 1977). Once differentiated, either trait tends to persist throughout childhood. Further, rural Mexican children have shown a stronger tendency toward cooperative behavior (and less competitiveness) when compared with urban Mexican children (Kagan and Madsen, 1971; Madsen and Shapira, 1970). Similarly, Madsen and Shapira (1969) found that children reared in a rural Israeli kibbutz appeared more cooperative that urban middle-class Israeli children. A formidable body of evidence supports the idea that greater value may be placed on cooperation among families living in less crowded, less urbanized settings, which are possibly characterized by less social conflict and less stress.

But because so many experimental studies employ highly specialized tasks, their generalizability in enfeebled, and culturally sweeping conclusions must be viewed with caution (Sherif and Rattnay, 1976). The selection of experimental reward structure, for example, of constitutes only one of dozens of situational variables to be accounted for, a fact that prompted Kagan and Madsen (1971) to note:

> Previous research ... indicates clearly that cooperative behavior can be elicited quite easily among children of all subcultures studied under conditions of group rewards. When children are switched to individual reward, however, children of some subcultures (kibbutz, Mexican villages) continued to cooperate, while children in other subcultures (urban Afro- and Anglo-American, urban Israeli and urban Mexican) began to compete in a nonadaptive manner. (p.33)

The cross-cultural research on competitive and cooperative behavior that has been published over the past few decades - which manipulates structured situations using small convenient samples - has been the subject of much valid criticism. Sherif and Rattnay (1976) cite these specific reasons for questioning the interpretation and conclusions of circumstantial-style competitive-cooperative research: (1) arbirary definitions of what behavior is competitive and what is cooperative; (2) artificiality introduced by the structure of games; (3) lack of uniformity of conditions involving rewards.

Nevertheless, dozens of studies have revealed, with remarkable consistency, one glaring developmental pattern: urbanized American children, reared amid the comfort and change of post-War technology, tend to be highly competitive. The strength of this American cultural press toward competitiveness was startlingly evidenced in experiments by Nelson and Kagan (1972). In tests involving games, where rewards (toys) were maximized by cooperation, Anglo-American children insisted on competing anyway, and even sacrificed their own gains in order to deprive those of their peers.

One critical underlying factor appears to be the child's age (or more exactly the developmental stage) which is closely connected to how the child responds in various circumstances. According to Nelson and Kagan

(1972), younger children (under six) may fail to cooperate because they do not yet understand interdependency or mutual assistance. But older children eschew cooperation in direct conflict-of-interest situations because of an apparently "ingrained competitive spirit," which, experimentally at least, has proven to be maladaptive (Nelson and Kagan, 1972).

The type of (apparently) counter-productive behavior, exposed in these studies as highly individualistic rivalry, implies the underlying premise, "If I can't win, no one can." Beating someone overrides all other concerns (Sherif and Rattnay, 1976). It is as if these children internalized one classic definition of "compete," which is "to strive to undo another for acknowledgment, a prize, supremacy, profit, etc" (Random House, 1973).

Nelson and Kagan (1972) demonstrated that competitiveness can indeed be irrational and self-defeating in certain settings, and that proneness toward what they term "almost sadistically rivalrous" behavior is a very culturally laden phenomenon. Their findings led them to the following social commentary.

> That urban children so seldom cooperate spontaneously indicates that the environment we provide for these children is barren of experiences that would sensitize them to the possibility of cooperation. Analogously, the lives of rural Mexican children are apparently barren of experiences that might sensitize them to the adaptiveness of competing. (p. 91)

PERSPECTIVE OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Anthropological evidence has shed much light on socialization. The search for answers to how and why people in different parts of the world adapt to the social forces of rivalrous comparison and living together has long been of keen interest to anthropologists. More than fifty years ago

May and Doob (1937) proposed that "an understanding of the role of competition and cooperation within a culture requires a knowledge of every important aspect of the social life" (p. 89). Early investigation into the nature of competition and cooperation as cross-cultural variants is illustrated no more lucidly than the painstaking field work done by Margaret Mead and her coworkers - work which culminated in a classic of anthropology entitled Cooperation and Competition Among Primitive Peoples (1937). The developmental significance of the study's title is underscored by Mead in her introduction: "To understand personality it is necessary to study character formation. What is the mechanism by which the newborn individual is transformed into a more or less adequate adult representative of his culture through the operation of cultural agencies" (p. 6)?

Because competition and cooperation are basic patterns of behavior which cut across social strata and span whole cultures, Mead (1937) considered these traits to be universal, and therefore the most critical in addressing an issue as deep and formidable as cultural determinants of personality. She viewed these complimentary traits (sometimes referred to as "habits") as constituting cultural foundations forming the very core of social expression and defining the essence of culture and personality development.

Among those so-called "primitive" cultures Mead and her team of researchers studied, observations of the Zuni Indians of New Mexico (Goldman, 1937) represent enlightening perspectives on developmental norms of competition. Zuni people labor collectively, raising grain crops and sheep in the mostly harsh and unforgiving environment of arid New Mexico. Housebuilding is a community endeavor. For Zuni women, meal preparation

and domestic chores are done in groups. Personal wealth and accumulation of property are deemphasized, and aggressiveness in interpersonal conduct is strongly suppressed. Ceremonials are also collective, with each ritual interlocking within a total pattern. Goldman (1937) summarizes Zuni philosophy: "Group must cooperate with group; individuals must cooperate with individuals within each group. One error and the rain may not come. Crops will wilt in the sun." (p. 337)

Zuni adults provide clear and consistent social modeling for their children, stressing nonaggressive cooperative styles of behavior - evidently very adaptive, given the environmental circumstances. And as Goldman (1937) further notes, "It is to this norm that the child, if he is to fit into the cultural framework set for him by his parents, must conform ... fitted to it under the most subtle stress of social sanction" (pp. 338-339).

Individualistic behavior, in fact, is discouraged by most contemporary Native-American peoples, largely because it is incongruous with their customary sense of harmony, humility and tribal unity (Richardson, 1981; Anderson and Ellis, 1988). Many Native-American children are not comfortable in competitive situations, nor do they like being singled out and made to perform openly in school (Anderson and Ellis, 1988). Athletic competition, however, is an exception since the whole tribe may benefit from winning[1].

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[1]Early accounts of recreational games played by North American Indians (from Maine to California) describe the intensely rivalrous game of "ball play," roughly similar to (and an ancestor of) modern LaCrosse (Mooney, 1983): "As speed and suppleness of limb and a considerable

Although anthropology is rich with descriptions of native play and contests that infer competitive social comparison, competitiveness is not a developmental trait that is typically associated with either Native Americans or those peoples who espouse an harmonious worldview. In one study of games played in 56 "primitive" societies (including some American Indian tribes), Roberts and Sutton-Smith (1969) found none that specifically combined the three attributes of physical skill, strategy and chance - elements that virtually define the most popular Americna competitive sports.

Attesting to the importance of Mead's culture-general model, Toda, Shinotsuka, McClintock and Stech (1978) conducted an impressive study of children from five different cultures, comparing the results with Mead's (1937) original classification of cooperative-competitive-individualistic

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degree of muscular strength are prime requisites in the game, the players are always selected from among the most athletic young men, and to be known as an expert player was a distinction hardly less coveted than fame as a warrior. To bring the game to its highest perfection, the best players voluntarily subjected themselves to a regular course of training and conjuring; so that in time they came to be regarded as professionals who might be counted on to take part in every contest, exactly like the professional ball player among the whites. To farther incite them to strain every nerve for victory, two settlements, or sometimes two rival tribes, were always pitted against each other, and guns, blankets, horses - everything the Indian had or valued - were staked upon the result. The prayers and ceremonies of the shamans, the speeches of the old men, and the songs of the dancers were all alike calculated to stimulate to the highest pitch the courage and endurance of the contestants" (p. 183).

The foregoing record, originally chronicled in 1890, could be mistaken for a recent college rugby match, cheerleaders and all. Tribal pastimes had an intensity all their own. Cooperative in spirit, yes; boring or simple, no.

Native Americans also maintained a farsighted view of women participating in competitive games, long before Title IX! Klamath (Oregon) Indian women, for example, vigorously played "tchimmaash," an active running game (Dorsey, 1901), vaguely reminiscent of field hockey.

orientations. Toda, et al. (1978) found that over the intervening decades a cultural learning process had occurred which produced a relatively high level of children's competitiveness by the sixth grade in all cultures, and that proneness to competitive or "rivalistic" choice apparently intensified with age. Toda et al. (1978) identified this phenomenon "phasing of competitive socialization."

Dramatic cultural differences in the way children behave in response to socialization processes are evident in scores of more recent anthropological studies as well. Children of the Punan Bah, a tiny ethnic group in the Bornean rain forest, learn social rules and expectations by age 3 (Nicolaisen, 1988). These children react systematically in accordance to Punan norms by demanding respect. According to Nicolaisen (1988), "from about five years of age children are usually aware of and sensitive to the competitive atmosphere of the community, to the pre-occupation with status and the fight for recognition and esteem" (p. 213).

In comparison, Chewong children, of the Malay Peninsula, are favored by their elders for being timid or fearful - the same traits typical of adults in this society (Howell, 1988). Apparently unconcerned with rivalrous social comparisons, Chewong parents never push or prod their children toward artificially accelerated development; the child grows in the absence of expectations about how he or she should progress. Coincidentally the Chewong believe that an individual's personality is fatalistically rooted in one's liver, and not a function of controlable childrearing practices or socialization (Howell, 1988).

It is interesting to note that far less variation in motivational orientation was apparent in the Toda et al. (1978) study than was observed by Mead (among the cultures she assessed) four decades earlier. Mead's thorough multidimensional field-observation method surely accounts for some of this difference. But comparison of Mead's observations with Toda and others suggests that half a century of intervening exposure to urbanized techno-industrial forces has influenced a nearly global cross-cultural shift away from cooperative styles of behavior and toward a more competitive and individualistic orientation. Perhaps this is related to exporting of Western values to an overpopulated world that is becoming more acutely aware of other societies and more despairately in need of dwindling global resources.

Despite myriad observational and experimental studies suggesting increasingly strong human urges of competitiveness, some social scientists consider infant development to be largely a product of "universal cooperative motives," which they believe explain how infants internalize the language and the culture of their parents (Trevarthen, 1988). According to Trevarthen (1988), infants, regardless of culture, are inherently predisposed toward cooperative engagement with other persons; they are "born with a self-regulating strategy for getting knowledge by human negotiation and co-operative action" (p. 39). Such imitative and conscious socialization may account for the remarkably rapid and adaptive learning of communication by infants; it may also prompt social awareness, especially evident in mother-infant interactions (Trevarthen, 1988).

EFFECTS OF COMPETITION

Assimilated Values - A Polarized Issue

Experts in child development have made astounding strides in recent years uncovering many complexities of child growth. And a deep appreciation of core cultural values serves to place understanding of a trait like competitiveness in a fuller context. Values pervade caregiver behavior (Stolz, 1967) and tend to be assimilated by children as part of culture itself. From early in life, children learn standard solutions for culturally defined problems (Fisch, Weakland and Segal, 1982); solutions that are heavily value-charged.

The roots of values that precede their behavioral manifestations go deep. Dissecting the essence of American values, Dubois (1955) theorized that American (middle-class) thinking is grounded on the premise that man is master of a mechanistic universe. Attempted mastery is acted out both individually and collectively through activities aimed at control and master, through the domination of nature and the environment, and through ardent striving for material well-being through hard work and achievement. Successful competition, Dubois (1955) argues, is thus an exalted social value. As children develop cognitive, social and physical skills, they learn the norms of society and gradually adopt its prevailing values. Historically, aggressive competitiveness and rugged individualism probably represent a logical adaptation to the harsh realities of the New World, helping pioneers, for example, expand the frontier. A strong competitive spirit doubtlessly empowered immigrants to cope with an alien impersonal industrialized America. In modern America, competition has emerged as a pervasive social norm (Martens, 1975), making winning a highly prized goal - some would say an obsession.

Although competitive games, play and sports are regarded as potent socializing agents and motivating forces for children (Martens, 1975; Schwartzman, 1978; Harris, 1983), competition is frequently criticized as generating antisocial and counteradaptive behavior (Orlick, 1978; Kohn, 1986). Proponents of competition contend that learning to compete is essential to successful existence in modern society (Martens, 1975). But despite convincing arguments, too little is known about the true psychological and behavioral consequences of competition and cooperation, especially as related to child development, to support unequivocal assertions. Conceptualization of the issues is often dichotomous and laced with emotion, reducing a consideration of the relative value of competition to simplistic polarized points of view; it is seen as either good or bad.

Crystallizing what amounts to a logic of negation (e.g. either "A" or "not A"), two exemplary quotations are presented. In 1974 President Gerald Ford, a former University of Michigan football star, made his views public in an article entitled "In Defense of the Competitive Urge," originally appearing in Sports Illustrated (reprinted in Vanderwerken and Wertz, 1985).

> Competing is always preferable to not competing, whether you win or not ... If you don't win elections you don't play, so the importance of winning is more drastic in that field. In athletics and in most other worthwhile pursuits first place is the manifestation of the desire to excel, and how else can you achieve anything? Broadly speaking, outside of a national character and an educated society, there are few things more important to a country's growth and well-being than competitive athletics ... (and) the competitive urge is deep-rooted in the American character. (p. 247).

By contrast, Alfie Kohn (1986) presents a collection of one-sided arguments roundly critical of the competitive mind-set in his book No Contest: The Case Against Competition. Kohn (1986) writes:

> Superior performance does not require competition; indeed it usually seems to require its absence ... Children simply do not learn better when education is transformed into a competitive struggle ... (that) often is a distinct cause of anxiety. Even if the tangible stakes - money, job, trophy, grades - are not always high when people compete, the psychological stakes invariably are. The possibility of losing makes for an emotional state that interferes with performance. My review of the evidence has convinced me that there are two important reasons for competition's failure. First, success often depends on sharing resources efficiently, and this is nearly impossible when people have to work against one another ... competition makes people suspicious and hostile toward one another and actively discourages this process. Second, competition generally does not promote excellence because trying to do well and trying to beat others simply are two different things. (Kohn, 1986, pp. 22-28).

Scores of similar rigidly dichotomous arguments by highly credible sources could be presented, bolstering the side of competition or championing cooperation. The issue has traditionally been debated with either/or thinking, clouded by the fact that evidence regarding outcomes of competitive behavior is highly conflicting. Even readily observable situations illustrate this. For example, bright children sometimes do poorly on standardized tests, like intelligence or achievement tests, which are scored and evaluated on a competitive basis. On the other hand, most world record performances in sport have occurred when the highest quality field of competitors is assembled, such as at world championships or Olympics, and when participants are subject to intense evaluation. Obviously, individual and situational variables play a critical role in both the competitior's attitude and the actual performance. It is illogical, therefore, to either worship or condemn competition.

Stress and Anxiety

The operating agent that may be common to both of the preceeding examples is stress, a variable known to be induced by, and inherent in, competitive situations. Although stress is fundamentally a very normal and adaptive response to threatening stimuli such as danger or uncertainty (Selye, 1956), stress inevitably produces an heightened state of arousal (Winters, 1985; Martens, 1975). As an individual's arousal (and related motivation) surpasses an optimal level, performance tends to decline in a predictable manner. Such a response pattern describes the classic behavioral phenomenon known as the "Yerkes-Dodson law" (Broadhurst, 1959; Goldenson, 1984).

Outcomes to competitive situations arising from the performance-arousal relationship are also affected by a host of other variables, some of which include an individual's motivation to succeed, motivation to avoid failure, the nature of the task, the actual instigating force (stimulus), as well as various more general antecedents of experience and personality (Atkinson, 1978).

It would seem that stress is a double-edged sword. Stress represents a valuable state of internal alarm. As a generalized response it sufficiently aroused early (humanoid) man, enabling him to compete and survive in a threatening environment by defending himself and preserving a niche in the food chain. Unfortunately, when such an historically adaptive response is applied to modern social situations where fight or flight outlets for stress are not available, stress turns out to promote disease, illness and acute anxiety (Selye, 1956). This is a paradox of modern

society that is felt by children and adults alike (Field, McCabe and Schneiderman, 1988).

Where children are concerned, anxiety is intricately associated with the stress of competitive situations in a manner similar to an audience effect (Martens, 1975). Anxiety-inducing factors in competitive youth sports have been studied extensively over the past two decades (Martens, 1977), with more questions raised than answered. In one study of young female sports competitors, Griffin (1972) found that 12 and 13 year-olds showed the most temoprarily aroused "state anxiety" , whereas 16 and 17 year-olds displayed the most "trait anxiety," or perceptions arising from stable personality elements. Both types of anxiety decreased as children grew older, perhaps due to the convergence of more experience and less need for approval. For Griffin's (1972) sample, participants in individual sports had higher anxiety than those playing on teams, suggesting that there may be some haven from anxiety in numbers or a supporting cast.

Scanlon and Passer (1978 and 1979) examined the psychological effects of competition on young (10 to 12 years old) soccer players, finding that "intrapersonal factors" and "situational factors" determined general anxiety levels both before, during and after games. Though far from broadly generalizable, their study attempted to connect a multiplicity of variables, about which Scanlon and Passer (1978) observed: "Players who were high competitive trait anxious, who had low self-esteem, and who had low performance expectancies perceived greater threat and experienced higher state anxiety when facing a pending competition than did those who were low competitive trait anxious, who had high self-esteem and who had high performance expectancies" (p. 119).

Other studies support the logical notion that children who are more competitively anxious worry more about their own performance. For these children, anxiety is closely related to fear of failure and fear of evaluation (Rainey, et al., 1987). Sherif (1978) underscores the importance of the context in which evaluation occurs: "Experiencing success or failure is always relative to the standards to which the child aspires. Like it or not, these standards are influenced decisively by significant adults, peers, and the images portrayed through the mass media of communication" (p.88). The process of failure as related to subsequent aspirations and outcomes is subject to active theoretical debate. However, the fact that anxiety and stress in children are concomitantly antecedents and by-products of competition is reason enough for genuine concern.

Failure, whether strictly personal or as part of a team, can have a profound effect on the child's developing mind. Some studies of youth sport teams have spotlighted game outcome (win, tie, loss) as a critical determinant of a child's post-game stress (Scanlon and Passer, 1979). As organized kids' sports become more and more pressure-packed, with greater imperative placed on winning, (Tutko and Bruns, 1976), high anxiety is a likely prospect. To paraphrase ABC Sports' slogan, it's not the thrill of victory, but the stress of defeat that seems anxiety-provoking for kids. For many children, the anxiety may be there even before the game (or practice) begins; or perhaps a predisposition is simply triggered by the competitive environment, like hay fever when ragweed bursts forth. Either way, anxiety seems to be as much a part of the "game" for kids as overbearing parents and winning-is-everything coaches (Eitzen and Sage, 1986).

Concern about psychological stresses prompted Martens (1978) to pose the basic question, "Are sports too stressful for children?" After reviewing experimental data which compared children's heartrates associated with various sports and music performances, Martens (1978) concluded that stress per se does not appear to be as much of a problem as the competitive anxiety so often accompanying stressful situations. Martens (1978) frames the issue this way.

> We know that all competition contains some uncertainty about the outcome, and thus is potentially stressful. Yet it is this same uncertainty in competition which makes sports challenging, and motivates youngsters to seek out competitive sports experiences. However, too much uncertainty, and uncertainty about some things can be very stressful. The perplexity of competitive stress is that there is a fine line between uncertainty being a challenge and uncertainty being overly stressful. And this fine line is unique to the psychological makeup of each youngster. Consequently, one kid's challenge is another kid's stress. (p. 24)

Since competition is inherently stress-producing, it tends to raise anxiety levels in children. Some competitive activities raise anxiety more than others, and in some children more than others. Numerous studies matching arousal and performance, point to an optimum level of stress and anxiety which is associated with high performance and positive behavior outcomes. But when stress exceeds that optimal point both the child and the performance will probably suffer. Some children learn to handle intense competition better than others, especially with repeated exposure that makes it less anxiety producing. For other kids stressful effects worsen, often causing them to opt out of competitive environments. "To know which activities are more anxiety producing and which athletic participants are more anxiety prone," Griffin (1972) reasons, "may prove useful to the physical educator and coach (and parent) in a wise handling of competitive situations" (p. 63).

In his thorough and insightful evaluation of the role of sport in contemporary society, Jay Coakley (1978) approaches the consequences of competition from the standpoint of performance outcomes as they are related to collective values vis-a-vis individual antecedents. According to Coakley (1978), the presumption that achievement of excellence is a logical result of competitive engagement, is one that is highly suspect and subject to debate.

It is difficult to make conclusive generalities about the dynamics or the need for other competitors based on real-life scenerios in sport. Intense, high quality Olympic caliber competition has set the stage for superlative feats and historic performances even from highly memorable "child" champions like (gymnast) Nadia Comeneci and (swimmer) Janet Evans. In other settings, swimmers who have conquered the English Channel or climbers who have topped Mt. Everest customarily struggle in silent isolation, unmoved by either rivals or crowds.

Despite occasional public achievements, when winning is obsessively emphasized, competence, genuine skill and excellence in performance may be sacrificed. DeKoven (1978) offers this sane bit of philosophy on games and winning: "Playing to win ... can mean a collaborative as well as competitive win ... we agree to compete;" by contrast, "When you have to win you're not concerned how well you're playing ... you've no way to evaluate what you're doing other than the score" (pp. 162-163).

Regarding the detrimental performance consequences of competitive mania, Sherif and Rattnay (1976) point to a developmental trend among American children in which a highly individualistic form of rivalry is often manifested in an attitude that idolizes beating a competitive rival regardless of the true quality of one's own skill or performance. As one's

motive to dominate another heightens, intrinsic excellence may be sacrificed to one's desire for superiority through winning. In the long run, however, a person's compelling need to vanquish an opponent seems less likely to be the genuine impetus to extending the limits of human ability, than more complex phenomena like achievement motivation and psychophysiological development.

While some observers embrace competitive situations for youth as performance showcases, others point to broader negative aspects. Coakley (1978) asserts that when players perceive the chances of winning as dismal, motivation is usually destroyed; this becomes a dampening effect, the exact nature of which is influenced by circumstantial, cultural and individual factors. Since losers of competitions far outnumber winners in overall competitive settings (as in a bracketed tennis tournament, for instance), the majority of participants would seem to perceive a greater likelihood of failure rather than of success. The odds against winning may present a dilemma or double-bind for children: the predominant outcome is losing, yet parental expectation is winning. Stated differently, the child is supposed to try hard to win, even though actual reinforcement for doing so may be rare. The implications in terms of negative impact on a child's developing self-esteem may be problematic.

Whether they be sporting events or spelling bees, violin recitals or school exams, today's competitive settings for children often tend to be highly organized and ritualized, for which they have been deservedly criticized. Webb (1968) calls overly organizing kids games the "professionalization" of youth. Warner (1979) cautions that organized sports for boys and girls may be "the last legalized form of child abuse sanctioned in America" (p. 213).

As a by-product of such a contemporary adult-oriented approach to youth sports, parents and coaches frequently maintain unrealistic and unreasonable expectations for both the performance and behavior of children (Orlick and Botterill, 1975). Aspiring child-athletes, even preschoolers, are expected to handle being cut from their team, to endure abrasive coaching, ignore disappointed parent-spectators, rebound from the letdown of losing a big game, and then overcome their own learned self-criticism for not playing to perfection. Pressure imposed by unrealistic or inappropriate demands on the child, compounded by the child's own desire to "measure up," may present an unhealthy developmental environment. There is the potential for genuinely traumatic effects, as suggested, for instance, by Lesser's (1960) claim that 40% of his anorexic patients acquired the disorder "in a competitive situation with which the patient could not cope" (p. 573).

The consequences of extreme competitiveness or rivalrous attitudes occasionally become manifested as psychiatric disorders. In order to appreciate how dysfunction might unfold, a brief look at the psychoanalytic theory of Karen Horney (1885-1952) is enlightening. (It is noteworthy that the powerful influence of early childhood in shaping personality is richly woven throughout psychoanalytic literature, with that of Horney no exception.) While not employing the label "competitive" per se, Horney's personality theory comes very close to mapping out an archtype competitive personality. A person may desire power over others by being aggressively competitive, Horney hypotheisizes, not only to compensate for a sense of helplessness, but also to gain security through achievement of success (Schultz, 1981). These behaviors are interpreted as a quest for self-protection in the form of defense mechanisms acquired early in life.

Horney synthesized her theory of mental disturbance into ten neurotic needs, which she construed as irrational solutions to a person's problems - especially a defense against anxiety (Horney, 1942). What makes an individual neurotic, says Horney, is the intensive or compulsive pursuit of satisfying their needs; this characteristic has much in common with Type A behavior, as discussed in the next section of this paper. The ten neurotic needs are (Horney, 1942):

1. affection and approval
2. a dominant partner in life
3. narrow and constricted limits to life
4. power
5. exploitation
6. prestige
7. personal admiration
8. personal achievement or ambition
9. self-sufficiency
10. perfection and unassailability

What is relevant about Horney's scheme, with respect to the antecedents of children's competitiveness, is that 8 out of 10 of the neurotic needs describe goals and motivation which demand that a person engage in some form of competitive and/or highly individualistic behavior. Such drives are seen as arising largely in response to an all-pervading basic anxiety having its foundation in repressed hostility acquired in early childhood (Schultz, 1981). In a conceptually compatible way, Horney (1942) analyzes needs for power, exploitation, prestige, admiration and achievement as drives aimed at moving "against people" in a clearly competitive manner. Schultz (1981) explains this point.

> As the label clearly indicates, aggressive personalities, in their constant movement against people, are the opposite of the compliant type. These people live in a world in which, as they see it, everyone is hostile and only the fittest and most cunning survive. The world is seen as a jungle in which supremacy, strength, and ferocity are the paramount virtues ... To achieve the control and superiority so vital to them, they must constantly perform at a very high level. In

> excelling and receiving recognition, such people find the satisfaction of having their strength and superiority affirmed by others.
>
> They must surpass others, and therefore they judge every person in terms of what benefit can arise from the relationship ... Since they drive themselves so hard to become the best and most competent, they may actualy become highly successful in their work, although they will not get any intrinsic satisfaction from the work itself. Their work, like everything else in their lives, is a means to an end, not an end in itself. (pp. 103-104)

One of the most interesting and subtle consequences of a child's competitive endeavors is the impact on parents. Though most investigation focuses unidimensionally on how children acquire competitive behavior and interests from their parents (Price, 1982; Rahe, Hervig and Rosenman, 1978), relatively little is understood regarding how parents are influenced by their children. Especially where participation in youth sports is concerned, the family adjustments that are virtually inevitable may produce reverse socialization, whereby parents become socialized into sport through their child's involvement (Eitzen and Sage, 1986). Bandura (1977) terms the general pattern mutual influence "reciprocal determinism" - the child to some extent is able to create his own environment, even in the form of parental interest. Bell (1979) refers to as "child effects," meaning cybernetic or interactive responses between child and parents.

Other significant contingencies exerting similar interactive influences include siblings, peers, coaches, school, community and mass media (Loy, et al., 1981; Eitzen and Sage, 1986). Greenspan (1983) offers vivid anecdotal portrayal of how parents of sports wiz-kids (who eventually became stars) were drawn toward involvement once their child showed genuine talent. Evidently, the promise of stardom facilitates a parent's devotion to the child's success beyond simply initial support, sometimes even manifesting a vicarious quest for fame.

TYPE A BEHAVIOR DEVELOPMENT IN CHILDREN

Competitiveness as a potentially maladaptive personality trait has been strongly indicted in the epidemiological construct known as "Type A" behavior. It is here, in the relatively recent and rich body of investigation linking personality to coronary heart disease (CHD), that understanding of the nature of competitiveness as a developmental phenomenon is enhanced significantly.

CHD studies in the mid-1950s identified a litany of risk factors closely associated with heart attacks and a variety of coronary problems. These factors included: high serum cholesterol, smoking and obesity (Friedman and Rosenman, 1974; Glass, 1977; Dembroski, Weiss, Shields, Haynes and Feinleib, 1978). But the most profound finding concerned the prominent role behavioral responses to stress played in promoting CHD, prompting Freidman and Rosenman (1974) to apply the label "Type A Behavior Pattern" in describing a complex of attitudes, behaviors and general personality traits which appeared to be bound together by the stress of intense and continual striving.

Though a variety of personality characteristics have been added to the now amorphous Type A classification, initially it was earmarked by an individual's excessive competitive drive tied to his chronic sense of time urgency (Friedman and Rosenman, 1974). Thus, an extreme level of competitiveness and impatience branded individuals as Type A's, setting them apart from "Type B's who show less intensity in those traits. During the past three decades, repetitive studies have convincingly established that Type A behavior is, in fact, a major CHD risk factor (Matthews, 1982; Steinberg, 1985); and that Type A persons are several times more likely to

suffer heart disease than Type B's (or others) when other factors are the same. Research has confirmed that intense competitiveness, as defined in Type A terms, is closely associated with heart disease.

Despite impressive findings with adult patients, understanding of Type A development as it relates to children is only fragmentary (Steinberg, 1985). Little is known about such questions as the interrelationship between genetic determinants, learning, and various cognitive factors; or the extent to which persons other than white middle-class American males (who are researched the most) exhibit Type A patterns (Cohen, Matthews and Waldron, 1978).

A primary line of research aimed at uncovering the childhood origins of Type A behavior has involved identification of children who are potential Type A adults. Observing that certain children behave more competitively, more aggressively and more impatiently than others, Karen Matthews (1978, 1979) developed a rating scale intended to asses the Type A construct in children. Known as the Matthews Youth Test for Health (MYTH), the instrument contains 17 subscales for evaluating a child's competitiveness, achievement-striving, impatience and anger (Matthews, 1980). Although researchers have used other methods, such as interviewing (Butensky, 1976), performance test batteries (Bortner, Rosenman and Friedman, 1970) and the (modified) Jenkens Activity Survey (Matthews, 1978), the MYTH assessment has been the most promising psychometric tool[2] for classifying Type A children. While validation of MYTH in relation to CHD is

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[2]For a more specialized purpose, Vealey (1986) has developed a "Competitive Orientation Inventory" which has been used successfully to predict levels of self-confidence as manifested in sports attitudes for high-school age children.

impossible[3], other evaluations of its construct validity and reliability have generally been supportive (Matthews and Angulo, 1980; Corrigan and Moskowitz, 1983; Vega-Lahr and Field, 1986).

Identifying excessively competitive children (i.e. Type A's), however, exposes only one part of the picture portraying this developmental aspect of competitiveness. Determining the critical antecedents of childhood Type A behavior is another one loaded with ambiguity and controversy. Matthews (1978) has framed a critical consideration in this way: "First are the antecedents of adult Type A merely Type A behavior in childhood, or are they some other combination of organized behavior, which later emerges as Type A?" (p. 210).

Another issue involves identifying what particular combination of characteristics shall be necessary and sufficient to classify an individual as a Type A. Most theorists regard the Type A construct as a valuable but conceptually loose descriptive analysis (Price, 1982), allowing for wide variations in formulated labeling and taking insufficient account of individual differences (Matthews, 1978).

But where the development of intensely competitive behavior is concerned, the root question seems to be: how do individuals, as children, become Type A's? Appreciating that "examining the antecedents of behavior is critical in understanding the behavior itself," Price (1982, p. 40) has advanced a model of Type A antecedents which unifies the most powerful Type A influences acting on developing persons. Her analysis distinguishes

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[3]Matthews (1978) acknowledges the dilemma of measuring the Type A trait in the absence of confirming physiological outcomes (i.e. CHD) in children.

antecedents in terms of social-cultural elements and personal factors, both of which set the stage for the childhood acquisition and maintenance of Type A behavior patterns. Even though an exhaustive investigation of these factors and supporting evidence is beyond the scope of this paper, a brief look at the salient components seems worthwhile.

Price (1982) proposes that foundations for individual competitiveness are found in fundamental prevailing Western beliefs. Most basic among these are: (a) an open economy where aggression, individual effort and successful competition are virtues rewarded with little regulation; (b) emphasis on materialism, with progress and success defined in terms of material (e.g. financial) achievements that are often seen as ends in themselves; (c) belief in unlimited economic well-being, status and upward mobility obtained through hard-driving competitive effort, and routinely rewarded as positive social values. According to Price (1982), interpersonal competitiveness is an inevitable consequence of the American system:

> In a society that places its highest value on material achievements and encourages competition, a great deal of effort is focused on trying to achieve more than others, leaving little time or inclination to develop an adequate sense of one's personal limits. Consequently, the picture is one of ambitious and competitive achievement striving with an almost exclusive focus on tangible accomplishments as the index of one's worth or well-being. (p. 44)

The latter perspective is in concert with Yankelovich (1981), who interprets much of the mental and emotional malaise of modern America as a function of misdirected and maladaptive efforts toward self-fulfillment by a generation raised on the idea of getting ahead and doing better through personal achievement. Yankelovich (1981) suggests that, for Americans to have a true sense of "fulfillment," a new ethic is needed; one that promotes a more cooperative attitude among citizens and less emphasis on competitive personal gain.

Materialistic secularism, Price (1982) says, is another factor that exaggerates the prevailing competitive environment in which children grow up. Contemporary deterioration of religion as a regulator of adversarial human interaction is reflected in a "godless Protestant work ethic" which eschews both firm moral principles and spiritual values as guides for personal actions[4] (Price, 1982, pp. 45-46).

Moreover, Price (1982) reasons that two other critical social factors encourage competitiveness as a norm for both children and adults. First, the stressful effects of urbanization, and all that it implies, probably constitute the most pervasive Type-A contingencies in modern society. Anthropological support for the deleterious impact of overcrowding is considerable. Dubos (1959) refers to social outcomes of competitive overcrowding as "modern horsemen of the Apocalypse." Pointing out that the

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[4]Traditional Christian reliance on the Bible for guidance in ways of living and thinking has been a powerful force in Westen culture. But there is support in the Bible for both competitive and individualistic tendcencies. Several Bible passages are inspiring in this regard.

> Do you not know that those who run in a race, all indeed run, but one receives the prize. So run as to obtain it. 1 Corinthians 9:24
>
> Even so the last shall be first and the first last, for many are called but few are chosen. Matthew 20:16
>
> Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the newness of your mind. Romans 12:2

Yet, there is adequate support in the Bible for a cooperative point of view as well.

> For none of us lives to himself and no man dies to himself. Romans 14:7
>
> Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation and every city or house divided angainst itself will not stand. Matthew 12:25

In book aimed at Christian athletes entitled simply Competition, Gary Warner (1979) devotes a chapter to "Jesus the Competitior." Jesus main adversary, of course was the devil; Warner says, "I believe the Jesus of the Gospels was so secure he could compete" (p. 195). Jesus, Warner says, competed for souls as a fisher of men, revealing a model of what it means to be competitive both in and out of sport (p. 197).

crowding that accompanies much of Western culture breaks down nurturing human "interconnectedness," Slater (1974) asserts that the conditions which "gave competitiveness survival value have long since evaporated" (p.29). Morris (1986) attributes human aggressiveness to a primitive (i.e. simian-rooted) competitive defense of territories and maintenance of personal hierarchy positions, motives now severely amplified by present world overpopulation as crowded societies proliferate.[5]

Finally, Price (1982) says, the openly accessible American education system is organized such that it promotes intense competitive achievement striving from the earliest years. As noted much earlier by May and Doob (1937), the socializing effect of a culture's education system is pervasive since it transmits the general social forms of competitive and cooperative behavior; indeed, "every aspect of a culture can be traced to and is reflected in some part of the educational process" (p. 109). Johnson and Johnson (1983) estimate that children perform no less that 85% of their school work in settings characterized by competition.

A relatively educated American labor force in a prosperous economy has created a nation of people with middle-class expectations (Bardwick, 1986), for which they must compete vigorously if such aspirations are to be realized. When children are pushed hard toward competitive responses, it may be connected to their parents' heightened awareness that soon enough their child will be facing a world with too many candidates for precious

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[5]Morris (1986) comments on violence and "blood-letting" practices in civilized urban societies: "It therefore constitutes a potential source of danger in our complex and crowded societies, where territorial and dominance restrictions can build up to an almost unbearable degree, sometimes finding release in a flood of pent-up aggression of abnormal savagery" (p. 134).

few desirable jobs. Most notably among educated baby-boomer families, America has witnessed an achieving frenzy over the last couple of decades, with youngsters now showing the effects of the rat race with classic Type A symptoms; for these "babes in stressland" the outlook is not rosy (Hales and Hales, 1989). Bardwick (1986) predicts that "the increased size of this pool of educated people is creating unremitting competition and this competition will continue in the coming decades" (p. 24). In an overall sense, then, modern American culture, as evaluated by Price's (1982) multifactorial model, is Type A personified.

Macrosystem effects of culture notwithstanding, there are various personal factors that also act as antecedents of Type A behavior. Unlike a child's temperament which appears to be established at birth (Thomas and Chess, 1977), there is very little evidence of a genetic or "innate" origin in Type A dynamics (Waldron, Hickey, McPherson, Butensky, Gruss, Overall, Schmader and Wohlmuth, 1980). In a comparative study of monozygotic and dizygotic twins by Rahe, Hervig and Rosenman (1978), Type A behavior, as measured by subject interviews, was found to be nonheritable.

Thus, a child's learning experiences may be the central determinant in terms of cognitive mediation or interpretation of ongoing events (Price, 1982). Indeed, research has consistently supported the interactive effects of a one's thoughts and feelings on one's subsequent behavior (Meichenbaum, 1974). Drawing heavily on Bandura (1977) and others who posit that people learn primarily from observing, instruction and experience, Price (1982) has amalgamated the multiplicity of forces acting on and within the individual into a systematic explanation of the developmental formation of Type A competitive behavior. Price (1982) concludes: "In these ways, children appear to acquire the values, beliefs expectations and rules of

conduct of their society. Vehicles through which this learning takes place include the family, the schools, and the media (especially television)" (p. 49).

Developmentalists who study Type A children generally acknowledge that child rearing practices play a massive role in shaping behavior and attitudes in children (Waldron, 1978; Matthews, 1978). One of the most critical aspects of parenting involves the style and circumstances of discipline. Physical punishment in particular appears to significantly affect development of Type A characteristics (Matthews, 1978).

Parental emphasis on achievement striving and success has also been generally established as a major factor contributing to both achievement motivation and Type A behaviors (particularly aggression and competition) in children (McClelland, 1961; Matthews, 1978; Veroff and Veroff, 1980). Matthews (1978) has found that parents of sons with high need for achievement maintain greater expectations and set higher standards for their children than do parents of children with lower achievement needs. Achieving children seem to manifest their parents' hopes and predictions. But high parental expectations can backfire, as evidenced by a consistency of studies showing high achievers (including gifted children) and offspring of highly successful parents frequently experience psychological difficulties before finishing high school (Hales and Hales, 1989).

Overwhelming evidence suggests that the foundations for Type A behavior may be laid very early in life, particularly for those children who learn that their value as persons is a function of excelling in relation to other persons, even siblings (Price, 1982). When parents are critical of a child for behavior below their expectations, and subsequently withhold approval until performance is exceptional, the child often responds by developing

his or her own private expectancies (Price, 1982). Some children become underachievers, unconsciously seeking to lower the demands placed on them, rather than risk failing to satisfy high parental standards.

If a child is praised only for succeeding (as expected by parents), he or she may soon deduce that how the game was played (i.e. the process of achieving) is of much less value than winning. When pushed hard by over-achieving or over-demanding parents, the child's real enjoyment of participating in play and games may evaporate (De Koven, 1978). In one retrospective study, most Type A adults felt that, as children, they were prized not for who they were but rather for what they had accomplished; they felt their parents' love had strings attached (Hales and Hales, 1989).

The stress that a child feels from parental demands can also be compounded by the effects of peers and group situations. As a child's personal success becomes more dependent on team or group outcomes, the result can be what Iso-Ahola (1980) refers to as Little League learned helplessness. Thus, when children go for the gold, as Hales and Hales (1989) point out, they run the risk of acquiring Type A traits "that can undermine their physical and psychological health for life" (p.50).

Though the cumulative strength of parental influence on the child's Type A competitiveness is generally acknowledged, the nature of each parent's individual role is less clear. In a study of values and beliefs expressed through child rearing, Stolz (1967) found that fathers placed more emphasis than mothers on "achievement," "recognition," and "aggression," values which imply competitive striving. "Independence," meaning self-reliance and individual freedom, was prized highly by both parents – out of a total of 59 factors it was ranked first by fathers and second by mothers (Stolz, 1967). Waldron (1978) states that "sex

differences in competitiveness appear to be fostered by parents and schools who have typically pushed boys to achieve in the occupational world and girls to seek success in the less competitive family sphere" (pp. 202-203). Family values, therefore, may be closely associated with the fact that the coronary-prone behavior pattern is more common among men than women.

The child rearing role of mothers, in terms of developmental outcomes, is particularly controversial. The idea that the mother has the power to shape her child's personality, including the engendering of competitive achievement-striving, has been a recurring theme in behavioral science. Throughout the Twentieth Century, this principle has been variously manifested in Watsonian behaviorism, Freudian Oedipal theory, Benjamin Spock's (1947) principles of parenting, and Margaret Mahler's (1975) theory of mother-infant symbiosis wherein she refers to mother as the "midwife of individuation" (p. 47). From his extensive analyses of achievement motivation, McClelland (1961) concluded that the role of fathers is secondary to mothers, since high achievers tend to have mothers who are dominant and demanding, but not restrictive. Slater (1974) attributes America's "exaggerated spirit of competitiveness" (p. 92) to an increasingly male-dominated society, and yet proposes that high achievers have mostly their mothers to thank: "Successful men, then, are brought up by their mothers who make certain they reject and transcend their fathers" (p. 114).

According to Matthews (1978), the literature on child rearing and personality suggests that mothers of achieving sons tend to be very competitive, controlling and involved with their sons' achieving efforts; while fathers are competent self-reliant men who encourage their child's

independent behavior. Often both parents turn "encouragement" into demands. In a recent profile of aging swimmer Mark Spitz, who won an unprecedented seven gold medals with seven world records in the 1972 Olympics, journalist Kenny Moore (1989) writes:

> As a child, Spitz was propelled by an explosive mix of talent and parental ambition. In 1970, his father, Arnold, was quoted as saying, 'Swimming isn't everything, winning is ... I never said to him, You're second, that's great. I told him I didn't care about winning age groups, I care for world records.' (p. 82)

Whether speaking of Mark Spitz' father or Brooke Shields" mother, parental roles will remain controversial; it is unlikely that one parent or the other "causes" Type A behavior in the child. Advising caution in the interpretation of Type A children studies, Matthews (1978) recommends an integrated viewpoint: "There are different patterns of maternal and parental interactions with high need achievement children, according to the sex of the children" (p. 213).

DISCUSSION

From the preceding review of developmental aspects of competitive behavior it is apparent that this is an area where there are few, if any, absolutes. Despite hundreds of research studies related to competitiveness and its personality corollaries, no ironclad categorical statements have been produced. At least none that have been consistently supported by research.

Despite the absence of undisputed truths, several inductive notions emerge when competition is examined from a variety of perspectives. First, competitive behavior as well as cooperative behavior have a developmental basis that is multifactorial. Investigators and parents alike may become unproductively enmeshed in searching for singular "causes" of behavior.

But there appears to be no simple easily identifiable explanation for competitiveness in terms of true observable causation. As one of many interwoven threads within the tapestry of human personality, competitiveness exists as an amalgam of traits and characteristics which are manifested with great variety.

Secondly, when competitive behavior is placed in full developmental perspective, a striking complex of interrelationships with other developmental phenomena emerges. To be realistically understood, competitiveness should be considered in terms of its relationship to achievement motivation, aggression, stress, anxiety, and other salient personality and behavioral variables. It must also be examined within the context of major social factors, such as child rearing practices, cultural values, socialization processes, as well as longer term macro-system trends that encompass biological, evolutionary and anthropological forces.

The fact that human competitive behavior is intimately related to so many other fundamental processes is nearly inescapable. Looking at Type A children provides a clear example. Close connections between Type A behavior and temperament, cognitive processes, social learning, parental modeling and socialization have all been observed. Later, in adults, Type A competitiveness often manifests physiological connections through measurable outcomes , most notably as coronary disease (Glass, 1977; Friedman and Rosenman, 1974).

Lastly, probing the development of competitive behavior reveals a process of adaptation quite similar to the complex of responses to stress. Much like the stress response depicted by Selye (1956), certain stimuli can provoke competitive responses that are socially and personally maladaptive, leading even to physical pathology. Glass (1977) suggests that Type A

behavior is elicited in susceptible individuals by uncontrollable stressful situations. On the other hand, the mere presence of a stressfully competitive environment has produced elegant behavioral responses ranging from astonishing natural adaptations of biological species to magnificent human accomplishments encompassing inventions, exploration, and world record athletic feats.

Regardless of certain physical and emotional costs, children's competitive behavior can be quite productive, and rewarding, often contributing to later adult successes, particularly in traditional male roles. Waldron (1978) points out that aggressive-competitive behavior is closely associated (and reinforced) with educational achievement, high status occupations, high income, and upward mobility - all socially desirable or esteemed consequences of successful competitive struggles. It is a cybernetic process or circular pattern which may be socially self-sustaining.

With regard to a continuum of outcomes, both positive and negative, competition bears a great deal of resemblance to stress. The dynamics, in fact, may be affiliated. Yet, as concepts, both competition and stress remain ill-defined. Decrying the conceptual confusion (and resultant impotent research) surrounding ambiguous nature of stress, Engel (1985) emphasizes this point: " ... the term stress has not been useful ... it often seems to inhibit rather than facilitate communication ... (because) it means different things to different investigators; and second there are a number of incorrect premises implicit in most concepts of stress" (p.3). The same may be said of competitiveness. In a parallel vein, Watson (1984) emphasizes that "It is important to clarify the existing interpretation of competition in terms of its theoretical structure" (p.206).

To underscore the limitations imposed by linguistic difficulties, it is interesting to note that the word "compete" is derived from the Latin "competere," which meant to meet or strive together for something (Random House, 1973). Similarly, "rival" stems from the Latin for "one who uses a stream in common with another" (Random House, 1973). Originally connoting associative behaviors, both words seem to have become sufficiently industrialized to now indicate conflict and opposition. It is noteworthy that over fifty years ago, May and Doob (1937) asserted that the terms competition and cooperation were useful only for broad generalizations; but "as aids to understanding of concrete situations and as guiding concepts for research they require more precise definitions" (p.3).

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

Despite the large body of research that has investigated numerous aspects of both competition and cooperation, relatively little is known about the true nature of the developmental dynamics of either. A great variety of important factors have been uncovered in previous studies, but their ultimate usefulness suffers from limitations all too common to research in the behavioral sciences: small sample sizes, biased samples of convenience, over-representation by middle-class Anglo children, questionable behavior analogues or indices, test instruments lacking construct validity, artificial constraints imposed in experimental setups, and the use of designs and conditions with little universality. Abundant as it is, research related to competitiveness is fragmentary, delving into nearly every facet of human functioning, but lacking a unifying theoretical framework which facilitates organized understanding. Drawing valid profound conclusions from such a body of information is like trying to find directions from a road map torn into small pieces with some missing.

Nevertheless, a few particular aspects of research seem to emerge as intriguing potential sources of understanding. One of these is the relationship of perception to competition in terms of how children differ in the ways they interpret competitive situations. Research conducted by Passer (1983), Brustad and Weiss (1987) and others has shown that the worries children have about their performances being evaluated pose a major developmental threat, especially to those children whose perception of self is low. Thus, the child's fear of criticism and of failure appears intimately tied to his or her self-concept.

Harter (1978, 1982) posits that a child's motivation to compete is essentially a function of his or her self-perception of competence. Harter's hypothesis has gained credibility through popular use of the associated psychometric instrument she developed to measure the competence construct - "The Perceived Competence Scale For Children" (Harter, 1982). Studies utilizing the "Harter scale," as it is now called, have indicated that the child's perception of competitive situations gives greater meaning to the observed behavior in those situations. A great deal more should be known about how children percieve competition in relation to self before predictive conclusions about competitiveness as a personality trait are presumed to be valid.

Another research dimension that bears consideration involves a more exacting delineation of alternative constructs that serve to define competitive type behavior. Research, for example, has been unable to distinguish clearly between the following conceptual comparisons: motives for superiority versus motives for excellence; goal-directed behavior and resistance reactions; cooperative actions and compliance (or obedience); control motives compared to dominance motives; acheivement needs and

approval needs; win-loss situations and multiple reward situations; desire for challenge as distinguished from desire for mastery; responses to competitive stress versus responses to conflict. These various psychological constructs and aspects of human behavior are juxtaposed to emphasize the subtlty of distinctions. Whereas studies have focused almost exclusively on behavior classifications limited to "competitive" and "cooperative" (and occasionally "individualistic"), it is possible that, by identifying further conceptual distinctions, understanding of the human dynamics at work would be enhanced.

Support and precedent for refining conceptual distinctions in a realm characterized by diverse phenomena is offered by Marwell and Schmitt (1975), who confronted this problem while searching for a comprehensive definition of cooperation. Observing that cooperative behavior normally involves goal direction, rewards, distributed responses, coordination, and a time dimension, Marwell and Schmitt (1975) conclude: "these five elements of cooperation may be combined in several ways to define 'types' of cooperation. In particular, several of the elements form a logical chain ... (and) the typology is constructed on this basis" (p. 7). A similar typology approach may be productively applied to differential styles of competition.

There appears to be growing sentiment for more specific definitions of Type A behavior pattern (TABP) components and combinations of components, prompted partly by recent inconsistent findings with global Type A attributes. According to Dembroski and McDougall (1985), "The accumulation of contradictory evidence from a range of apparently well-controlled studies suggests to us that study of globally-defined TABP as a unitary risk factor for CHD is no longer a profitable or defensible

strategy"(p. 227). (Apparently theirs is a voice crying in the wilderness, as the literature continue to emphasize predominately global Type A on the basis of its presumed validity.) Research efforts would probably be more fruitful if emphasis were placed in the direction of "cultural, behavioral, psychophysiological, and pathophysiological significance of the uncovered attributes" of Type A (Dembroski and McDougall, 1985, p. 228). It is evident, therefore, that some creatively alternative ways of approaching competitive behavior, along with its antecedents and consequences, be developed.

In Table 1 ten different forms of competitive type behavior are classified and described. This more detailed categorization represents a set of variations in: (a) exhibited behavior; (b) object of the behavior; (c) valence, or prevailing mood; (d) relationship to Type A model; (e) dominant source of motivation. It is presented not as an hypothesis or a formal model, but rather for the purpose of prompting a more visionary perspective on the concept of competition itself.

The type of distinctions summarized in Table 1 may be a useful tool in more accurately identifying specific behavior patterns for research, and possibly for diagnosis and treatment of certain disorders. Customarily, persons exhibiting the Type A behavior pattern are assumed to be intensely "competitive," often described as "hard driving" (Price, 1982). But by simply attaching a label to an aggregate of tendencies, "competitiveness" gets lumped together with the inventory of additional personality traits associated with Type A coronary-prone persons (Price, 1982). More subtle aspects of a person's overall behavior, when collected under the rubric of competition, tend to become obscured by traditional aggregate models.

Table 1

Alternative Dimensions of Competitive Type Behavior

Behavior	Characterized by	Object	Valence	TypeA	Motivation
Achieving	accomplishing success by persistent effort	goal	pos.	yes	I & E
Comparative	seeking higher relative estimation or worth	others	pos.	yes-a	E
Competent	properly qualified, capable or adequate	self	neut.	no	I
Contending	moving against some other person or thing	others	neg.	yes-b	E
Contesting	struggling for victory or supremacy	others	pos.	yes-b	I & E
Excelling	surpassing others or goal by superior performance	others & goal	pos.	yes	I & E
Individual	distinguishing one's self as independent or unique	self	neut.	no	I
Opposing	resisting adversely, or antagonizing others	others	neg.	yes	E
Rivalrous	vying to win superiority or a common goal	another & goal	neut.	yes	E
Striving	working hard toward goal or overcoming an opponent	goal & other	pos.	yes	I & E

Notes: How to read Table 1. "Object" column identifies what or who behavior is directed at; "Valence" concerns the overall mood or disposition of behavior (positive, negative, neutral); "Type A" identifies if the behavior tends to be related to common Type A characteristics, based on usage in literature; "Motivation" distinguishes whether behavior is primarily self-generated or "intrinsic" (I), influenced from outside or "extrinsic" (E) or driven by both (I&E).

a. often cited under need for recognition or advancement.

b. this behavior cited frequently under "struggle."

Thus, research may be persistently inhibited by an inability to accurately identify and specifically isolate less obvious but powerful differentiations in behavior, affect and cognition with respect to the general cluster of characteristics now labeled "competitiveness."

As a practical example of how behaviors or traits may easily be confused in the absence of a suitable taxonomy, consider the contrast of behavior described as "excelling" with behavior classified as "rivalrous." The child who tries to excel through her performance in sports or academics may be attempting to please herself or her parents, or to gain respect from her peers. Her activities are generally earmarked by goal-direction, accomplishment, high standards of skill, objective measures of performance, and a desire to transcend difficulties. On the other hand, the rivalrous child is typically trying to undo or outdo another child (perhaps a sibling) in his quest for a common objective. This child enters a zero sum game, where for one to win the other must lose. Whether to win parents' attention (Schantz and Hobart, 1989), or to get a playmate's toy, some relative superiority is sought. With rivalry there is no real standard of

performance; only social comparison - a process that has been loosely called "incentives for relatedness" (Veroff and Veroff, 1980). [Shantz and Hobart (1989) provide a particularly insightful analysis of sibling dynamics, distinguishing the dimensions of "conflict" and of "rivalry."]

Both children in the above comparison may be construed as exhibiting competitive behavior. Both may even be classified (hypothetically) as "competitive-trait-anxious" (Martens, 1977), particularly if each child sees their respective situation as threatening. But the behaviors, goals, motivations and circumstances are considerably different.

The preliminary taxonomy of competitive variations and comparisons found in Table 1 has been presented primarily to prompt further discussion. The foregoing line of reasoning may offer a potentially productive avenue for subsequent investigation in developmental competitiveness. Just as Engle (1985) recommends the utilization of "some alternative strategies for addressing experimental and clinical issues" (p. 3) with respect to stress, the suggestion here is for alternative investigations in which new concepts of competitiveness are applied.

One of the most exciting recent directions in child behavior analysis involves applications of living systems theory. Bergin (1987) has utilized Living Systems Framework (LSF) as a means to describe the complex interaction of parent processes and child variables that contribute to children's prosocial behavior. Innovatively adapting LSF concepts, Bergin (1987) orgainized experimental variables into, (a) governing subsystem processes (i.e. directive, regulatory, and control), and (b) arousal subsystems. Among Bergin's findings, it was shown that forceful discipline, a regulatory process, correlated negatively with child prosocial behavior; whereas parental influences on the child's control

processes, including rehearsal and mastery, were positively and significantly correlated with prosocial behavior.

REsearch of this kind, which takes into account many universal processes within the developing child, has enormous potential for studying competitiveness within a systems context (e.g. persons as systems, acting within a family system, etc.). Amerikaner (1983) affirms the remarkable similarity between theroetical constructs of personality development and dimensions of living systems, a convergence which may prove useful in describing behavior within systems at many levels. According to Americkaner (1983, p. 313), systems theories have contributed to an emerging "world view" that emphasizes "wholeness, context, circularity and pattern" - important assumptions for studying the developing child.

CONCLUSION

Competitiveness, then, is a rubric which gathers in a multiplicity of factors, behaviors, traits and outcomes. As a positive developmental characteristic competitive behavior can be elegantly adaptive, constructive and successful, as many young sports champions and high achievers can attest. But extreme or inappropriate competitiveness can also be detrimental to the developing child, not only as an unconstructive social response, but also in terms of Type A risk potential either for a young child or later in adulthood.

To assert that competition is destructive and that cooperation is the ideal (or vice versa) amounts to myopic and rigidly archaic simplism. Competitiveness appears to be a phenomenon which is found neither in the person nor the situation, but rather depends on some interaction between the two. Perception and interpretation may also interact to the extent that a person's behavior and performance are greatly affected by the

dynamics of changing the situaion into either a competitive one or a cooperative one. Evidence consistently indicates that when children mature in developmental environments devoid of either competition or cooperation, their potential ability to cope with a great variety of life's challenges in impaired.

With respect to the developing child, competition and cooperation should not be considered any more mutually exclusive than right and left brain hemispheres, or work and play, or physical and mental growth. The child growing up in America will benefit greatly from understanding that winning in any form of competition very often depends on group cooperation, and that success very often depends on individually rising above the group.

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